



Morning Alert - Tuesday, November 29, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that a duck farm in Aomori was infected with H5 avian influenza on Monday. All commercial networks led with reports that Japanese singer ASKA was arrested again on Monday for using stimulants.

Lead items in national dailies included the Health Ministry's plan to require patients aged 70 years and older to pay more for medical services, a plan by the GOJ to reduce the difference between the salaries of regular and non-regular employees, and the GOJ's move to continue the Monju sodium-cooled fast reactor project for about 10 more years to obtain technical expertise on improving the safety of fast reactors.

INTERNATIONAL

Trilateral summit between Japan, China, ROK unlikely

Yomiuri claimed that the chances are high that Prime Minister Abe will not be able to convene a trilateral summit with Chinese Premier Li and ROK President Park in Japan next month given that the South Korean leader will probably be impeached. Although Seoul may consider sending Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn instead of the embattled president, Premier Li would probably choose not to visit Japan if that is the case. Some GOJ officials are proposing a postponement of the trilateral session until next January or later.

Japan, China hold first security dialogue in 20 months

Several papers reported from Beijing on a Japan-China security dialogue held there on Monday for the first time in 20 months. The papers speculated that during the nearly four-hour session over dinner, the two sides exchanged views on issues of mutual concern, such as North Korea, the South China Sea, and the agreed-upon launch of a communication mechanism between the SDF and the PLA to head off inadvertent incidents in the East China Sea. The Japanese side explained the comprehensive security laws and the U.S.-Japan alliance and called for greater transparency in China's defense budget. Although the participants reportedly confirmed the importance of building and deepening mutual confidence by continuing to hold direct dialogue, no noticeable progress was made on the launch of the communication mechanism. Nikkei added that Japanese and Chinese diplomats plan to hold a meeting today to discuss the proposed trilateral summit in Japan by Prime Minister Abe, Premier Li, and President Park.

Japan to hold "2+2" meetings with UK, France, Australia

Nikkei reported that the GOJ is expected to hold bilateral foreign and defense ministerial meetings with Australia, the UK, and France starting in December in order to develop a common understanding of the global security situation prior to the inauguration of the Trump administration on Jan. 20. Foreign Minister Kishida and Defense Minister Inada plan to visit London and Paris for "2+2" meetings with their counterparts in January. Japan hopes to conclude a bilateral acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA) with the UK and plans to update its corresponding pact with Canberra.

U.S. circulates draft sanctions resolution on DPRK

Mainichi wrote from New York that the USG has forwarded to the 15 member states of the UN Security Council a draft resolution calling for tougher economic sanctions on North Korea, explaining that the draft calls for the establishment of an upper limit on DPRK coal exports, the designation of additional DPRK entities and individuals to be subject to asset freeze, and restrictions on bank accounts held by North Korean diplomats and other senior officials to prevent money laundering. The new resolution is intended to close "loopholes" in the previous sanctions resolutions adopted in March this year.

Senior LDP official to attend Fidel Castro's funeral

Mainichi reported that the GOJ decided yesterday to send LDP Election Committee Chairman Furuya to Havana as Prime Minister Abe's emissary to attend the funeral for Fidel Castro. According to the daily, Foreign Minister Kishida met with visiting Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment Malmierca yesterday and extended his condolences. In response, the Cuban official said: "Mr. Castro strongly condemned the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki."

POLITICS

Diet session extended through mid-December

All papers reported on a consensus reached yesterday between the Kantei and the ruling coalition to extend the current Diet session until Dec. 14 in order to ensure the enactment of several pieces of key legislation, including pension reform and the TPP. They agreed that the Diet session should be ended ahead of Russian President Putin's planned visit to Japan on Dec. 15-16. Mainichi explained that although the Kantei initially insisted on a 10-day extension through Dec. 10 so as to allow the premier to prepare for the two summits with the Russian leader in Yamaguchi and Tokyo, it eventually yielded to the LDP Upper House leadership's call for a longer extension on the grounds that deliberations on the TPP and pension reform legislation have been prolonged primarily because of gaffes made by Agriculture Minister Yamamoto and Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hagiuda, who both are close to Abe.

Yomiuri projected that the ruling parties may choose to extend the session again through late-December if necessary depending on the progress of deliberations on the pension bill so as to allow the premier to call public attention to the administration's achievement of enacting not only the TPP legislation but also the pension reform bill. By extending the Diet term twice, the Kantei may also hint at Abe's intention to dissolve the Lower House for a snap election with the goal of discouraging the opposition camp from upping the ante since the Democratic Party and other opposition parties are apparently not prepared for a general election. Nikkei said that although the Kantei is aware that public understanding for the pension and TPP bills are still insufficient, it is determined to pass them in the belief that Abe probably won't lose popularity even if the controversial bills are enacted.

The opposition bloc reacted strongly to the planned extension and decided to submit no-confidence motions today against Health Minister Shiozaki and Lower House Health, Labor, and Welfare Committee Chairman Niwa for railroading the pension reform bill at the lower chamber. Asahi said the TPP legislation is likely to be approved by the upper chamber by Dec. 9, but parliamentary endorsement of a bill to update the existing bilateral acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA) with the U.S. is unlikely to be obtained during the current Diet term since no discussions have been held thus far.

Ruling coalition to begin deliberations on casino bill

Most papers reported that the ruling coalition decided on Monday to send legislation that would legalize gambling to the Lower House Cabinet Committee for deliberations. The LDP is reportedly hoping to enact the legislation during the ongoing Diet session that will be extended through mid-December. However, since the junior ruling partner Komeito party and the opposition Democratic Party are demanding "extensive deliberations," the chances are slim that it will be enacted this year.

SECURITY

Onaga reiterates determination to thwart FRF construction

Tokyo Shimbun ran an interview with Okinawa Governor Onaga in which he vowed to “employ all tools available” to block the present plan to build the FRF off Camp Schwab. As for the planned reversion of part of the Northern Training Area next month, the governor expressed opposition to the possible use of new helipads in the remaining training field by the Futenma-based Ospreys. However he also said: “It is considerably difficult to take issue with the reversion per se.”

